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SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: THE GOVERNMENT KEEPS ITS COOL AS PRESSURE
ON ELECTORAL REFORM HEATS UP

REF: KUWAIT 1773 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (U) Debate over constituency reform continues with the Government requesting on May 17 the convening of a special National Assembly session on May 22 to discuss the draft law to reduce the number of electoral constituencies from 25 to ten. Post contacts report that the Government is considering withdrawing its draft and that independent MPs, who have vowed to grill the Prime Minister if the Government backs away from its ten-district plan, were meeting separately to draft a new and "fairer" version of the constituency law.

¶2. (U) The 29 MPs who favor five electoral constituencies have not backed away from their threat to grill the Prime Minister if a five-district plan is not proposed. A grilling request, under the names of independent MPs Ahmed Al-Saadoun and Ahmed Al-Mulaifi and Islamist MP Dr. Faisal Al-Mislim, was submitted to the National Assembly General Secretariat at 12:00 PM May 17.

¶3. (U) In contrast to the fiery speeches delivered by many members of the pro-reform bloc, the Government has maintained its cool. In a May 16 meeting with editors-in-chief of the local dailies, Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Mohammed Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah asserted that the next parliamentary elections would be held in 2007 on the basis of the ten constituency option. He also expressed the GOK's willingness to consider any fresh proposal submitted by any MP or a group of MPs, noting that the Government is willing to withdraw its ten constituency draft law if an alternate proposal is approved by a majority of the National Assembly members.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Some of our contacts believe that a cooling off period for a few days would not be a bad thing. The debate on electoral reform got very loud and in some cases personal. Even dissolving Parliament, which at the moment most observers do not expect, would not portend a crisis that would affect USG interests.

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